

Heywood's Wagga destiny

DAVE HEYWOOD WON'T LET PAST OBSTACLES GET IN HIS WAY OF WINNING THE WAGGA WAGGA TOWN PLATE PICTURES: KYLIE SHAW

Astute trainer Dave Heywood would much rather focus on the 2015 version of the Wagga Wagga Town Plate than dwell on his past efforts in the premier country sprint.

Heywood has tried unsuccessfully for 37 years to win his hometown feature and has a trail of hard luck tales to tell about his runners.

But the bad fortune has failed to dampen Heywood's enthusiasm and he is set for another tilt at the XXXX Gold Town Plate (1200m) on Thursday, April 30 – the first time the race has been worth \$100,000.

Heywood plans to saddle up his star sprinter Living On A Prayer, who was a gallant third to Unanimously in last year's edition of the event.

While he has celebrated more than his share of major wins – including the 1985 Wagga Wagga Gold Cup with Pride Of Indies – Heywood admits he is frustrated that the Town Plate has so far eluded him.

"I don't like to think about the amount of bad luck I've had in the race," he said. "It's mainly been with the barrier draws.

"He's Unique bolted in with the Town Plate Prelude in 2006 but then drew 18 in the big one and had no hope.

"Living On A Prayer won the Prelude two years ago but also had a wide draw to contend with in the Plate.

"Probably my best chance would have been King Of Indies. He was flying but came up with barrier 20 so I scratched him and took him to Warwick Farm for a Saturday race two days later and he won by six lengths.

"He would have been a good thing in the Plate had he drawn a half-decent alley."

Heywood has had other close calls.

"One year I finished second with Hillston Exchange, while another time Green Ridge (a winner of 43 races) flew home from last and ran third," he said.

"It's frustrating because it's a race I'd



Popular Wagga Wagga trainer Dave Heywood

love to win. My goal is to knock it off before I retire."

Heywood, who turns 70 in June, had an accomplished career as a jockey before turning to training in 1972.

His most memorable day in the saddle came in 1960 when at the tender age of 15 – and only eight months into his apprenticeship – he rode in Australia's greatest race.

Heywood legged aboard the Tommy Woodcock-trained Reinsman in the Melbourne Cup, finishing unplaced to Hi Jinx in a field of 34.

"Looking back it's hard to believe I had such an opportunity when I only had my first race ride on February 20 that year," he said.

Heywood did not take long to make a name for himself in the training ranks. His initial Town Plate runner was Prince Of Indies, who ran fourth in 1977.

"Prince Of Indies was my first good horse and ended up winning 24 or 25 races," Heywood said.

Eight years later it was a horse with a similar name that provided Heywood with the highlight of his career.

Pride Of Indies stormed to victory in the Wagga Wagga Cup with Rod Quinn aboard.

"It was unbelievable ... definitely my best day as a trainer," Heywood said.

He had 30 horses in work at his peak but is now content to have a boutique stable of four.

"I'm happy just pottering around with four at a time," Heywood said.

"A lot of horses means a lot of work and there is also plenty of pressure. I'm semi-retired and I'm enjoying it more now than ever before."

Heywood is rarely without an open class galloper in his team, with Living

On A Prayer his latest stable star.

Living On A Prayer was bought by Heywood's clients at the Dubbo yearling sales for \$15,000.

"He's a brother to Inside Fifty (track record holder for 1000 metres at Wagga Wagga) which is what appealed to a couple of the boys," Heywood said.

"And I liked him from the first time I saw him. He's a bloody good type and showed promise right from the start. We got 14-1 about him at his first run and he paid for himself a few times over by winning at Corowa."

Living On A Prayer has gone on to

tally 10 wins and more than \$220,000 in prizemoney. With the Town Plate prizemoney boosted from \$85,000 to six figures, Living On A Prayer is certain to face a strong field.

The pinnacle of the Murrumbidgee Turf Club's two-day carnival will be the Listed \$140,000 JAM Media Wagga Wagga Gold Cup (2000m) on Friday, May 1.

Leading trainers will also be eyeing the \$40,000 Audi Centre Wagga Wagga MTC Guineas (1600m) and the \$35,000 Queen Of The South (1400m) for fillies and mares in addition to the \$50,000 Inglis bonus on the 2YO Hcp (1200m) on April 30. **RNSW**



Living On A Prayer scores at Wagga Wagga for the Heywood stable